THE MANUFACTURE OF HERACLIANUS' USURPATION (413 CE)

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In the spring of 413, the *comes Africae* Heraclianus decided to withhold the African grain shipments to Rome. Immediately afterwards, he set sail with an army to Italy. However, he was swiftly defeated there, and then murdered after his return to Carthage. His revolt is puzzling, and comes as a total surprise, because hitherto he had been a loyal servant to Honorius;[1] indeed, he had been awarded the western consulship for 413 prior to it.[2] His rebellion has usually been interpreted as an attempt to usurp imperial power, in the same fashion as have been those of so many other contenders about the same period. However, I will argue that Heraclianus was not a usurper, but that he had simply wished to secure his influence over Honorius at a time when he felt threatened by the latter's *generalissimo* Constantius.[3]

I. HERACLIANUS' EARLY CAREER

Heraclianus makes his first appearance in the surviving sources when he executed the disgraced western *magister utriusque militiae* Stilicho on 22 August 408, for which service he was rewarded with the position of *comes Africae* (Zos. 5.37.6). There is no evidence for his life and career prior to this event, but he must already have held some middle-ranking office, and have shown some merit in this, to be given the senior command of the African field army.[4] Stilicho's brother-in-law Bathanarius held this office from at least July 401 (*CTh.* 9.42.18), but Honorius had him executed. Orosius reports that Heraclianus was sent to Africa during Attalus' usurpation (Oros. *Hist.* 7.40.10). However, Alaric only

An early version of the article was presented at the Ancient World Seminar at University of Melbourne in 2014. I would like to thank Hyun Jin Kim and Roger Scott for their feedback at that time. This article also profited significantly from constructive comments by the anonymous peer-reviewers of this journal. The final research results were made possible thanks to funding provided by the Research Council of Flanders ("Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen" = F.W.O.).

[1] *PLRE* 2: "Heraclianus 3," 539–540. Very few studies deal with Heraclianus' revolt specifically: see Oost 1966; Kotula 1977; Gaggero 1991; Ménard 2007. For modern treatments of this period, see Stein 1959; Matthews 1975; Blockley 1998; Demandt 1998; Heather 2005; Halsall 2007; Börm 2013; Lee 2013a. All dates are c.e.

[2] *CTh.* 15.14.13; Oros. *Hist.* 7.42.10; Prosper *s.a.* 413. *CLRE* 360.

[3] It has to be noted that the concept of *generalissimo* is of course a modern construct, made famous by the work of O'Flynn (1983), but already used by earlier scholars such as Stein (1928: 320, 368, 477), Cameron (1970: 97), and Demandt (1970). Nevertheless, the concept can be meaningfully used to analyse this era. See Wijnendaele 2016b; Wijnendaele 2018.

[4] Oost 1966: 236; Kotula (1977: 257) and Demandt (1998: 116) describe Heraclianus as simply "an officer" at this point. Perhaps he was a *tribunus* of the *scholae palatinae* or a *domesticus* in the emperor's household troops.

proclaimed Attalus as emperor after his second siege of Rome in late 409,[5] and it is hard to believe that Ravenna would have waited a full year to send a replacement for Bathanarius. It is more probable that Heraclianus was sent to replace Bathanarius at the earliest opportunity, and by the spring of 409 at latest. Once there, he participated in imperial suppression of schismatic movements in Africa (*CTh.* 16.5.51, 56).[6]

Heraclianus played a key role in preserving Honorius' throne for him during the height of the Gothic conflict. When Attalus was proclaimed emperor by Alaric at Rome, he and Alaric quarrelled over how to win Africa to their side. Attalus sent his new appointee Constans to Africa with an inadequate force because he placed his faith in the predictions of some diviners that no actual battle would be necessary (Soz. 9.8.12–22; Zos. 6.7.5–6).[7] However, Alaric had wanted to send a larger force, just in case violence did prove necessary (Zos. 6.7.4). Alaric seems to have been the better judge of the situation, since Orosius claims that Heraclianus defended Africa vigorously against those sent by Attalus, which suggests at least some fighting (Oros. *Hist.* 7.42.10). Once he had secured his position in Africa, Heraclianus sent funds to Honorius which allowed him to bolster the loyalty of his troops at a critical time (Zos. 6.10.2). He also placed pressure on Attalus' regime by cutting the grain supply to Rome (Zos. 6.11).[8] Unable to relieve the situation at Rome, Alaric saw no alternative but to depose his puppet emperor and re-open negotiations with Honorius.

Not everybody was equally impressed by Heraclianus' conduct, however. Writing from Palestine after Heraclianus' downfall, Jerome painted a dark picture of the *comes Africae* as a drunken glutton who abused and extorted Italian refugees (Hier. *Ep.* 130.7). However, this image is too rhetorical: Jerome even compares Heraclianus to Orcus, a monstrous god of the underworld. Accusations of insobriety and slothful behaviour were also levelled in this period against the *magister utriusque militiae per Africam* Gildo and the usurper Constantine III, not coincidentally by authors writing shortly after their downfall and taking the dynastic viewpoint.[9] Furthermore, one needs to consider the specific context

[5] *PLRE* 2: "Priscus Attalus 2," 181.

[6] It was during his tenure as *comes Africae* that a church council at Carthage in 411 condemned Donatism as a heresy. On this, see Brown 2000: 330–339; Graumann 2011; Shaw 2011: 544–586.

[7] Elton (2014: 135) states that " 'this was not a battleworthy force' since it contained no 'barbarians'; clearly Zosimus saw barbarians as better troops than Romans." However, this misrepresents the dispute between Attalus and Alaric, which was about the number of troops that should have been sent to quell Heraclianus, not their ethnicity.

[8] Liebeschuetz (1990: 72) proposes that one of the reasons for Alaric's move to Sicily, after the sack of Rome, was to cross over into Africa and punish Heraclianus because of the latter's vigorous resistance to him and Attalus. This is an attractive idea, but Liebeschuetz himself concedes that Alaric's exact motivations for the doomed mission to Africa cannot be reconstructed from the surviving sources.

[9] On Gildo's debauchery, see Claud. *Gild.* 447–453. On Constantine III's, see Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 2.9 (based on the lost but contemporary history of Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus). It should be observed here that Jerome also tended to take a legitimist view on disgraced generals, for example,

of Jerome's accusations. They appear in a letter whose addressee was a certain Demetria, a teenage girl who belonged to the Anicii and thus was a member of one of Rome's most illustrious noble families.[10] The letter was a spiritual exhortation on her decision to embrace virginity. It would have been a matter of courtesy on Jerome's behalf to sympathize with her plight as she abandoned her ancestral home. Demetria would not have been the first aristocrat converting to a more modest lifestyle, while still reflecting on earlier comforts before her flight and the hardships endured along the way.[11] Writing in 414, Jerome would have had no qualms rebuking a dead and disgraced local commander, especially one who had been unable to give his full support to people like Demetria. It is very likely that Heraclianus, arriving in Africa and taking up his office at the height of the Gothic crisis in Rome, will have had his hands full with organizing his diocese's defences against Attalus and sending support to Honorius. When an influx of refugees from Italy became stranded on Africa's shores, Heraclianus and his staff (including Sabinus) will simply have been ill-equipped to properly process each and every person's case. Nevertheless, the silence of Augustine, who actually witnessed such refugees personally, should lead us to take Jerome's vehement accusations with a grain of salt.[12]

Furthermore, when Constantius confiscated Heraclianus' property after the latter's death, he was disappointed to discover that its actual value was not as high as he expected (Olympiod. *Fr.* 23).[13] Heraclianus may have dabbled in corruption, a ubiquitous phenomenon among late Roman imperial officials,[14] but apparently he had not been so avaricious as to leave behind a substantial fortune; certainly not on the same level as the *magister utriusque militiae per Africam* Gildo, whose amassed wealth required a separate chancellery to manage it after his death in 398 (*ND. Occ.* 12.5).[15]

After Alaric's sack of Rome, we hear nothing about Heraclianus for a couple of years. When Honorius appointed him as consul for 413, this was probably as a reward for his services during the Gothic war in Italy.[16] It was an extraordinary honour that deserves some further consideration. Alexander Demandt

his characterization of Stilicho as *semibarbarus* (*Ep.* 123.17). For further exploration of this theme, see Humphries 2002.

[10] On Demetria's background and Jerome's letter, see Cain 2009: 160–166.

[11] The most famous example would be Paulinus of Pella (*Eucharist.* 154–245).

[12] Oost 1966: 237.

[13] I follow the edition of Blockley (1983) for all references to Olympiodorus' fragmentary history.

[14] See especially MacMullen 1988: 137–170, with the critical review of Ward-Perkins (1993) and the more nuanced view of Kelly (2004: 138–185).

[15] It could be argued, however, that Gildo was a local aristocrat who had served in the region for more than a quarter century, and thus had more opportunities to enrich himself in the process. Yet Olympiodorus' remark on Constantius' surprise does seem to suggest that Heraclianus could have done more to look after his own financial interests during his stint as senior commander of the African forces.

[16] That he was not designated earlier can be explained by the general chaos in these years, evidenced by the slow and confused dissemination of western consulships between 409 and 411 (see

(1970) has observed that from the hegemony of the western *magister peditum* Merobaudes (ca 375–383) onwards, these senior commanders were the only military men to receive the western consulship.[17] However, Demandt overlooked the case of Heraclianus, which is indeed exceptional. None of the *comites Africae* before or after him ever received this distinction. From Heraclianus' point of view, this mark of Honorius' favour may have strengthened his resolve in his upcoming endeavour: in this very same year he set sail with an army to Italy.

At first glance, this behaviour is hard to explain, since until late 412 there were no obvious signs of problems in Africa.[18] It has been argued that Heraclianus revolted in order to avoid facing repercussions for the crimes he had committed against refugees.[19] However, this is based on the testimony of Jerome, clearly exaggerated and of dubious reliability. Orosius claims that Heraclianus revolted because he felt that he was in danger, but does not explain the precise nature of this danger (*Hist.* 7.42.12). However, Oost has plausibly identified the rise of Honorius' new *magister utriusque militiae* Constantius as the source of this danger.[20]

Heraclianus had good reasons to fear Constantius. In 411, he conducted a campaign that saw the destruction of the British usurper Constantine III's regime in Arles and was soon manoeuvring to act similarly against the Gallic usurpers Jovinus and Sebastianus in the Rhone valley.[21] This was an extraordinary development given the pandemonium that had followed in the wake of Stilicho's demise, not to mention Alaric and Honorius' sabre-rattling resulting in the sack of Rome. In these highly volatile times, control of the entire western military establishment was as stake. Constantius was a highly ambitious man, he had more access to the emperor than Heraclianus had, and he would naturally have wanted to cement his grip on power by placing his own men in key offices. Furthermore, he was responsible for the death of Olympius (Olympiod. *Fr.* 8; Philost. *HE.* 12.1), Heraclianus' patron, and so would also have wanted to remove anyone who might have harboured any lingering loyalty to him. The death of Olympius was a particular

CLRE 354–357). Honorius himself took the western consulship for 412, so only the following year could Heraclianus have been rewarded for his services.

[17] For further considerations on the importance of the consulship to the military aristocracy of this era, see Croke 2014: 119–123.

[18] Shaw 2011: 51. Gaggero (1991: 215–216) believes that there was a phase of increasing tension before 413, but this cannot be established from the surviving sources. Heraclianus will probably also have needed to devote considerable energy in this period to the suppression of the Donatists, following their defeat at the conference of Carthage. After all, he had received personal instructions from the court to punish dissent with *proscriptionis et sanguinis* ("proscription and blood," *CTh.* 16.5.51, 56).

[19] Stein 1959: 265.

[20] Oost 1966; followed by Gaggero (1991: 214) and Shaw (2011: 50).

[21] For these events, see Matthews 1975: 307–315; Burns 1994: 246–256; Drinkwater 1998; Kulikowski 2000.

blow to Heraclianus in that it probably removed his major source of support at the imperial court. When Honorius issued a decree in 412 giving Constantius a free hand to interfere in the African diocese against men hunting down deserters and ravaging the provinces (*CTh.* 7.18.17), this was a clear sign that Constantius had his sights on control of Africa also. At the very least, it was a thinly veiled rebuke to the *comes Africae*, the highest authority in all matters relating to military personnel in the diocese.[22] To Heraclianus, however, it probably seemed but a prelude to a more serious and sustained attack upon his position. Before examining his consequent revolt, however, it is necessary to evaluate the specific guise it took, and to ask the question: did Heraclianus proclaim himself emperor or not when he revolted?

II. HERACLIANUS AS USURPER

Scholars have often stated that when Heraclianus revolted in 413, he set himself up as an emperor and that he was, therefore, a usurper.[23] Not all scholars apply this label, however, and some rather speak of this event as a (military) revolt.[24] This ambiguity is based on the fact that several ancient sources call him a "tyrant" or use words to this effect. Olympiodorus specifically reports that he had aimed at τυραννίδα ("tyranny," Olympiod. *Fr.* 23), as does Hydatius, who states that along with Jovinus and Sebastianus he was *tyrranidis inflantur insania* ("puffed up with a passion for tyranny," Hyd. 43 [51]).[25] Kotula (1977: 261) singled out the testimony of the Gallic chronicle of 452 as the best evidence for Heraclianus' imperial aspirations, arguing that the claim that Heraclianus had acted "for the restoration of the Roman world" (*Chron. Gall.* 452, 75) was typical of similar ones made by various emperors, and probably preserved "un echo de sa [Héraclien] propagande." Indeed, Constantius [III] was hailed as *reparator rei publicae* ("renovator of the state") in an inscription set up in his honour.[26] However, in so doing, he relies on Mommsen's conjectural emendation of the text to read *in Romani orbis reparationem* and not the actual reading *in Romani Urbis reparationem*, which he dismisses as "peu comprehensible dans le sens

[22] Shaw 2011: 51.

[23] *PLRE* 2: "Heraclianus 3," 539; Courtois 1955: 131; Kotula 1977; O'Flynn 1983: 63; Modéran 1989: 852; Muhlberger 1990: 177, 187; Elton 1996: 229; Demandt 1998: 493; Lancel 1999: 267; Kulikowski 2004: 161; Merrills and Miles 2010: 147; Lee 2013b: 106; Salisbury 2015: 90; Lenski 2016: 185. Goffart (2006: 96) enigmatically states that after Alaric's sack of Rome "North Africa was lost to a usurper and regained." Goffart does not specify the identity of this usurper, but Heraclianus is the only plausible candidate given what we know of events in the early 410s.

[24] Jones 1964: 188, 190; Oost 1966; Hoffman 1969a: 95; Matthews 1975: 316; Brown 2000: 337; McEvoy 2013: 199–200. Yet Oost (1968: 119), in a change of heart, later calls Heraclianus a "usurper."

[25] I follow the edition of Burgess (1993) for all references to Hydatius' chronicle.

[26] *CIL* VI, 1719. See also Lütkenhaus 1998: 198–206 for discussion of Constantius' self-representation in epigraphy.

historique."[27] Yet if we respect the original Latin, the Gallic chronicler's words could mean no more than that he is praising Heraclianus for his stance during Attalus' usurpation in Rome, as we know from other sources.[28] Furthermore, it is difficult to understand how the author of the Gallic chronicle of 452 could have accessed any genuine information about Heraclianus' revolt. In reality, his knowledge of non-contemporary events, especially those outside Gaul, often leaves much to be desired.[29]

The most likely way for the chronicler of 452, or any other author, to have learned of Heraclianus' imperial ambitions would have been through coinage, since, if he had really had intended to proclaim himself emperor, issuing coinage would have been the clearest demonstration of this fact.[30] All the contemporary usurpers, such as Constantine III, Priscus Attalus, Jovinus, and even the ephemeral Maximus in Spain, struck their own coinage.[31] Carthage had once contained a mint, and the usurper Domitius Alexander had struck his own coinage there a century before.[32] Furthermore, during the tenure of the *comes Africae* Bonifatius (ca 422–432), this mint was re-opened when it produced coins for the emperor Valentinian III.[33] However, there is no evidence that Heraclianus himself struck any coinage at all. Had he done so, it is extremely unlikely that none of his coins would have survived. This is perhaps the most telling argument against any claim that he had attempted a usurpation.[34]

A second argument against identifying him as a usurper is that none of the surviving pieces of imperial legislation punishing him or his supporters refers to him as such. In early August 413, Honorius wrote:

> We adjudge that Heraclianus is a public enemy, and with due authorization We decree that he shall be punished and that his ill-omened head shall be cut off. We pursue his *satellites* also with like criminal prosecution. But We grant permission to all private citizens and members of the imperial service that they shall have full power to denounce [*prodere*] all these *satellites* before the public officials. (*CTh.* 9.40.21)[35]

[27] Kotula 1977: 261, no. 4. Muhlberger (1990: 185) also follows Mommsen's (1892) emendation and translates this as "restoration of the Roman world." The newly restored edition by Burgess (2001: 75) clearly shows that the original Latin is not *orbis* but *Urbis*.

[28] Alternatively, it could be scathing irony since Heraclianus' disruption of Rome's grain supply had caused a dire famine (Zos. 6.11.2).

[29] Burgess 1990; Muhlberger 1990: 148.

[30] Gaggero 1991: 217. Ménard (2007: 268) acknowledges that the absence of inscriptions and numismatic evidence cast doubt whether Heraclianus truly had been a usurper. However, in the rest of her article she still presents him as such.

[31] Robertson 1982: 445–449; Kent 1994: 138–154.

[32] Salama 1976.

[33] Kent 1994: 232–234; Calabria 2004.

[34] For the vital link between the striking of coins and usurpation, see Drinkwater 1994.

[35] *Heraclianum hostem publicum iudicantes digna censuimus auctoritate puniri, ut eius resecentur infaustae cervices. Eius quoque satellites pari intentione persequimur. Sed hanc omnibus privatis atque militantibus licentiam damus, et omnes prodendi in medium habeant liberam facultatem.* Tr. Pharr 1952: 258.

Furthermore, he decreed that:

> The name of Heraclianus shall not be preserved in private or public recollection, and We therefore decree that all the acts that are said to have been done under him shall be nullified. (*CTh.* 15.14.13)[36]

Certainly, Heraclianus is condemned as a public enemy and criminal. Yet nowhere do these texts explicitly describe him as a usurper. The statement that Heraclianus' acts needed to be nullified does not imply that he had started issuing his own imperial legislation. In the late Roman empire, newly designated consuls possessed the privilege of manumitting slaves.[37] Similarly, the mere act of *damnatio memoriae* does not in itself prove much, since it was used as much against private individuals who had never laid claim to the throne as against failed usurpers.[38]

Next, one should note the prominent failure of a number of independent authors or sources to include Heraclianus within their catalogues of usurpers. Polemius Silvius does not include him in his list of usurpers under Honorius.[39] Nor does the author of the *Narratio de imperatoribus domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae* include him in his.[40] To this one may add the failure of Augustine to describe him as such,[41] referring to him as a *hostis*, in the manner of the legislation noted above, rather than as a *tyrannus*.[42] Most importantly, however, while Orosius describes the downfall of Heraclianus in the same section as he

[36] *Heracliani vocabulum nec privatim nec publice ulla memoria teneat, ideoque submovenda esse censemus, quaecumque sub eo gesta esse dicuntur.* Tr. Pharr 1952: 438–439.

[37] For example, see Amm. 22.7.2, criticizing Julian for doing so at the start of 362, as performing the manumission should have been the prerogative of the new consul Mamertinus. Ménard (2007) elaborates further on these principles, while still believing that Heraclianus tried to usurp imperial power in 413.

[38] Szidat 2010: 328. The most famous examples in this period are Stilicho (*CTh.* 9.42.22) and Nicomachus Flavianus. On the latter, see Hedrick 2000.

[39] Pol. Silv. *Laterculus* 78–79: *Honorius, sub quo Gratianus et Constantinus, bisque Attalus, Constans, Maximus atque Servatus, Marcus, Magnus et Maximus Iovinus, Sebastianus ac Victor tyranni fuerunt* ("Honorius, under whom Gratian and Constantius, Attalus, Constans, Maximus and Servatus, Marcus, Magnus and Maximus, Jovinus, Sebastianus, and Victor had been tyrants").

[40] Narrat. imp. d. Val. et Th.: *Idem tamen princeps cum adversum externos hostes nihil umquam prospere gesserit, ad excidia tyrannorum felicissimus fuit. Quorum plurimos, id est Constantinum cum filiis, Iovinum cum Sebastiano fratre, Attalum Gothorum viribus fultum, Maximum Hispaniae purpuratam aliosque nonnulos superavit cepit extinxit* ("Yet while this same emperor accomplished nothing worthwhile against external enemies, he enjoyed the utmost fortune in the destruction of usurpers. Most of them—Constantine and his sons; Jovinus and his brother Sebastianus; Attalus, propped up by Gothic power; Maximus, purple-clad in Spain; and several others—he defeated, seized, and destroyed"; tr. Murray 2000: 162).

[41] Shaw (2011: 585) rightly remarks that Augustine's silence on Heraclianus probably originated from "a desire not to alienate the court at Ravenna from enforcing the hard-won results of the conference of 411."

[42] Lancel (1999: 268) suspects that Aug. *Sermo Denis* 16.1, which was preached at Carthage during the summer of 413, discreetly refers to Heraclianus: *Inimicus est? Homo est. Hostis est? Homo est* ("Is he a personal enemy? He is a man. Is he a public enemy? He is a man").

does that of each of the usurpers Attalus, Constantine III, Constans, Maximus, Jovinus, and Sebastianus, he seems deliberately to avoid describing him as a usurper (*Hist*. 7.42.3–7). Indeed, since he finishes this section with the remark that he had described the downfall of *tyrannorum uel inoboedientium ducum* ("usurpers and insubordinate *duces*"), he seems to have included Heraclianus as one of these insubordinate *duces* instead.[43]

Another argument against identifying Heraclianus as a usurper is that those who served with or under him do not seem to have been punished with the same enthusiasm or harshness that one might have expected in the case of servants of a usurper. For example, Orosius reports that after Heraclianus' death, his *domesticus* and son-in-law Sabinus fled to Constantinople, but was later handed over to the western court. However, after his return, he was merely exiled (*Hist.* 7.42.14). Given that both Orosius and Jerome attest him as a collaborator of the *comes Africae*, Sabinus' punishment seems rather lenient, certainly so when one takes into consideration that close male relatives of usurpers usually shared their fate in this period, as can be seen in the execution of Constantine III's son Julian, or that of Jovinus' brother Sallustius, neither of whom had been elevated.[44] Indeed, a senior officer could even be punished for his over-zealous pursuit of those who had continued to serve under Heraclianus, as when the *comes Africae* Marinus was relieved of his command for the execution of the *tribunus et notarius* Marcellinus and his brother Apringius, former proconsul of Africa, both of whom remained in office throughout Heraclianus' revolt (Oros. *Hist*. 7.42.16).

How then do we explain references to Heraclianus as a usurper? The most probable explanation is that fanciful rhetorical denunciations of him as a *tyrannus* were not recognized as such, but were accepted at face value by our surviving sources, who label him similarly. Here one notes the increasing tendency to identify even those who had not actually aimed at imperial power as *tyranni*. For example, Claudian condemned Gildo as the "third usurper" after Magnus Maximus and Eugenius (*Gild.* 6, 149, 475), despite the fact that this African commander never proclaimed himself emperor or tried to remove Honorius.[45] Rufinus, the eastern Praetorian Prefect and rival of Stilicho, was similarly denounced in 395 (*Ruf.* 2.268–269). However, it was all too easy for such allegations of tyranny to be taken at face value in the early 410s when the state was indeed plagued by a multitude of real usurpers. In this instance, one suspects

[43] Lütkenhaus 1998: 69; followed by Szidat (2010: 26–27). The other individual who probably belongs in this category is Constantine III's renegade general Gerontius, who proclaimed his *domesticus* Maximus emperor. *PLRE* 2: "Gerontius 5," 508.

[44] *PLRE* 2: "Iulianus 7," 638; "Sallustius 2," 971. On the treatment of factions who had previously backed usurpers, see Leppin 2015. It could be objected here that Stilicho's son Eucherius was also killed shortly after the former's execution in 408. Neither was a usurper, yet their immediate proximity to the imperial throne through bloodlines, and their access to armed retainers in Italy, will have made them appear significantly more threatening immediately after their fall from grace.

[45] See Wijnendaele 2017a.

that Constantius will have encouraged his mouthpieces to denounce Heraclianus as a usurper, in the same way that Stilicho seems to have encouraged Claudian to denounce Gildo.[46]

Finally, the possibility that Heraclianus was not a usurper should not come as a surprise. Usurpation of the imperial office by an individual in Africa was incredibly rare: the last attested usurpation in Africa was that by Domitius Alexander (308–310).[47] The reasons for this are not hard to gauge. As Warmington (1954: 112) notes, no western emperor visited Africa after the tetrarch Maximian (298), and the diocese became in effect "a military backwater." However, a usurper who wished to succeed needed sufficient military backing, hence Britain and Gaul, with their proximity to the Rhine armies, were far more fertile breeding grounds for usurpers.[48] It is true that Africa rose in prominence towards the late fourth century, due to its economic importance to the western imperial government, and it became even more significant as the only western province unaffected by the breakdown of imperial security in 405. Indeed, Honorius specifically praised her as *maxima regni nostri pars* ("the greatest part of our realm") in 411.[49] Nevertheless, Africa lacked the military clout a contender for imperial power required. The question, therefore, is what Heraclianus really intended by his invasion of Italy if, as seems probable, he can never really have hoped to overcome the forces ranged against him there.

heraclianus' landing in italy

In early 413, the regime of Jovinus in Gaul was crushed by Athaulf's Goths in service of Constantius, and the heads of the usurper and his brother were sent on a tour through the major western cities (Olympiod. *Fr.* 20). At about the same time, Heraclianus held up the grain shipments, and then set sail with an enormous fleet:

> After illegally holding up the corn supply from Africa, [Heraclianus] sailed to Rome with a huge fleet, certainly with one that seemed unbelievably large in our days. For he is said to have possessed 3,700 ships, a number which history does not record even Xerxes, the famous king of Persia, or Alexander the Great, or any other king as possessing. (Oros. *Hist.* 7.42.12–13).[50]

But why did Heraclianus suspend the grain shipments to Rome? It is difficult to understand what he could have hoped to achieve by targeting Rome in this way, so the obvious suggestion is that this action had not really been aimed at Rome

[46] On the use of panegyrists as "spokesmen" of military aristocrats in this era, see Gillett 2010.

[47] *PLRE* 1: "L. Domitius Alexander 17," 43; Salama 1976; Le Bohec 2007: 97–99.

[48] Wardman 1984: 235.

[49] *Gesta Con. Carth.* 1.4. Cited by Kotula (1977: 260, no. 7).

[50] *[A]liquamdiu Africana annona extra ordinem detenta, ipse tandem cum inmensa, certe temporibus nostris satis incredibili classe nauium Romam contendit. nam habuisse tunc tria milia septingentas naues dicitur, quem numerum ne apud Xerxen quidem praeclarum illum Persarum regem et Alexandrum Magnum uel quemquam alium regum fuisse historiae ferunt.* Tr. Fear 2010: 410.

at all, and that whatever harm the city suffered was merely collateral damage. The answer, I suspect, is that Heraclianus suspended grain shipments to Rome not to attack the city itself, but in order to sabotage Constantius' agreement with Athaulf in Gaul. The key point here is that Constantius had promised food provisions to the Visigoths in return for the destruction of Jovinus' regime and the safe return of Galla Placidia, Honorius' half-sister and their hostage since the sack of Rome in 410.[51] However, when the time came, Constantius was unable to deliver on his promise, and the Goths turned hostile as a result (Olympiod. *Fr.* 22.1). When a settlement was finally reached in 416, no less than 600,000 *modii* of grain were granted to the Goths (Olympiod. *Fr.* 30). Such an amount of grain could not have come from Spain, which was outside imperial control, or from war-wrecked Italy. Only the African provinces were able to provide it.[52] There can be no doubt, therefore, that Heraclianus' revolt was the immediate cause of Constantius' inability to provide the Visigoths with grain, and the key factor in provoking the resumption of hostilities between Visigoths and Romans.[53] Heraclianus, therefore, was using food supplies as a political weapon, although not in the traditional manner.

While Heraclianus may have been harbouring plans to revolt for some time, Constantius' command to send grain to Gaul as a reward for Athaulf's Goths probably served as the trigger. Furthermore, he probably decided to suspend all shipments of grain to make sure that Constantius did not try and divert any to Gaul. Then, after what he probably judged was sufficient time to disrupt the delicate negotiations between Athaulf and Constantius, he set sail to Italy himself, with both the grain-ships to relieve any developing shortages of food in Rome and a naval force sufficient to prevent these provisions from falling into the wrong hands.

A few scholars have asserted that Heraclianus' attack on Italy was not aimed at Honorius, but at Constantius.[54] Heraclianus may well have intended to attack Constantius; it is therefore noteworthy that he did not try to establish himself at Rome, as the usurper Attalus had done.[55] Orosius gives the false impression that he was still headed for Rome when he was confronted by the *comes* Marinus and fled in terror:

> But as soon as he had disembarked and started towards Rome with his troops, he encountered *comes* Marinus and fled in terror. Seizing a ship, he returned to Carthage alone, where he was immediately killed by a group of soldiers. (Oros. *Hist.* 7.42.14)[56]

[51] *PLRE* 2: "Aelia Galla Placidia 4," 888–889.

[52] Moss 1973: 713, no. 21.

[53] Stein 1959: 266; Jones 1964: 188; Oost 1968: 120; Matthews 1975: 316; Bleckmann 1997: 588.

[54] Blockley 1998: 131; Heather 2005: 256; Börm 2013: 60.

[55] *Contra* Gillett 2001: 141, no. 43.

[56] *is simul ut cum agmine militum ad urbem pergens litore egressus est, occursu comitis Marini territus et in fugam uersus, arrepta naui solus Carthaginem rediit atque ibi continuo militari manu interfectus est*. Tr. Fear 2010: 410.

However, Hydatius preserves a more detailed account of events revealing that he was defeated in a major battle at Utriculum:

> Heraclianus advanced his army from Africa against Honorius, but after being defeated at Utriculum in Italy in a battle, which resulted in the slaughter of 50,000 soldiers, he fled to Africa. He was himself later executed in Carthage in the *aedes Memoriae* by assassins sent by Honorius. (Hyd. 48 ([56])[57]

There are good reasons to prefer Hydatius' account over Orosius'.[58] Despite the fact that Orosius was a contemporary author, arriving in Africa shortly after the suppression of Heraclianus' revolt, he shows throughout his *History*'s sections on the Theodosian dynasty a marked tendency to both distort battles or fail to grasp the full sequence of political and military events that even later authors understood better.[59] Hydatius, despite being a self-professed chronicler on "the edge of the world" (*intra extremam universi orbis Galleciam*, Preface §6) writing in mid fifth-century Gallaecia, tends to provide more authentic information than Orosius when reporting the same events.[60]

Since Utriculum lies to the north of Rome along the Via Flaminia, it becomes clear that Heraclianus had actually bypassed Rome altogether when he was finally confronted and stopped.[61] While Hydatius does not actually state how many soldiers fought on each side at this battle, the fact that he claims that 50,000 were killed suggests that he believed that several tens of thousands at least had

[57] *Heraclianus mouens exercitum de Afrca aduersus Honorium Vtriculo in Italia in conflictu superatus effugit ad Africam, caesis in loco supradicto L milibus armatorum. Ipse post Carthagine in aede Memoriae per Honorium percussoribus missis occiditur*. Tr. Burgess 1993: 85.

[58] Van Nuffelen (2012: 110, no. 46) considers the possibilty that Hydatius used Orosius as a source for the early part of his chronicle. However, while both may have used a version of the *Descriptio consulum* (formerly known as Theodor Mommsen's *Consularia Constantinopolitana*), other links between the two works seem non-existent. I would like to thank Richard Burgess for personally communicating this observation. Indeed, in those parts of both men's work relating to the period where one would expect most overlap (i.e., 410–418 C.E.), there is in fact very little to be found (see below, n. 60).

[59] Noteworthy examples are his account of Theodosius' civil wars with Magnus Maximus and Eugenius (7.35) and of Gildo's defeat in 398 (7.36). Recently, Wijnendaele (2016a) has similarly demonstrated that Orosius' account of the invasion of Radagaisus in 405/6 cannot be relied upon despite its exhaustive description (7.37.4–16).

[60] Hydatius (35 [43]) notes that, contrary to Orosius' exceedingly rosy picture of Alaric's sack of Rome in 410 (7.39), people were killed inside the city despite Alaric's orders. Orosius casually remarks that Jovinus' usurpation failed as soon as it started (7.42.6), while Hydatius was aware that it lasted for over two years and even specifies Narbonne as his place of execution (43 [51]; 46 [54]). While Orosius only says that the Gothic *rex* Vallia fought for Constantius against other barbarian groups in Spain, who soon pleaded to set up treaties with Rome (7.43.13–14), Hydatius provides several entries on the progress of Vallia's campaign, starting against the Siling Vandals in Baetica (59 [67]), followed by their crushing defeat of the Alans in Lusitania where the latter were so nearly annihilated that they had to seek shelter with the Hasding Vandals in Gallaecia (60 [68]), after which Vallia's Goths were recalled and settled in Aquitaine (61 [69]).

[61] Shaw 2011: 51.

done so. In the case of Heraclianus' force, such a figure would be consistent with Orosius' claim that he sailed with 3,700 ships to Italy, but neither figure is particularly convincing. The fact that Alaric had thought that 500 Gothic soldiers would be enough to deal with Heraclianus in Africa only four years previously in 409 suggests that he is hardly likely to have had more than a few thousand men when he landed in Italy (Soz. 9.8.44–45).[62] That this was the probable scale of things is suggested by the fact that only 2,500 men had been sent against the Mauri rebel-leader Firmus in the early 370s (Amm. 29.5.29), and only 5,000 against Gildo in 398 (Oros. *Hist.* 7.36.5–6).[63]

As for Heraclianus' intended destination when confronted at Utriculum, the probability is that he had been headed towards Ravenna. At this point in time, most of Honorius' field army—or what was left of it—would have been posted in the north near the Alps, ready to intervene against the usurpers or Athaulf's Gothic army in Gaul.[64] If Heraclianus had managed to get to Ravenna and meet the emperor face to face, might he have been able to persuade him to denounce Constantius? There is no reason to suppose that Constantius, at this early stage in his career, could not have been removed in the manner of Stilicho.[65] Heraclianus' receipt of the western consulship for 413 strongly suggests that Constantius had not yet established a position of supremacy at court.[66] While the latter had performed a valuable service by destroying the regime of Constantine III, it would be a mistake to see his power as absolute already in 412/3. Heraclianus could claim to have performed equally valuable services to which Honorius directly owed his throne. While Constantine III and Jovinus were a distant menace in Gaul, Attalus had directly besieged Honorius at Ravenna in 410 (Olympiod. *Fr.* 10). Yet it was Heraclianus' provision of funds to Honorius, and his cancellation of the grain shipments to Rome, that contributed most to destroying the threat posed by Attalus.[67]

Furthermore, there is reason to suspect that Honorius was not greatly concerned about who actually conducted the military side of government. One of the main contributing factors to his ability to keep his throne for three decades was that he was willing to let ambitious generals carry out governmental affairs and overlook their elimination by rivals.[68] He had even been willing to sanction the overthrow of his own father-in-law, something Heraclianus was keenly aware of, since he himself had decapitated Stilicho (Zos. 5.37.6). This had happened

[62] Zosimus (6.12.1) claims that the majority of the senate was in favour of this proposal.

[63] It has to be acknowledged that inflated army numbers are a prevalent problem among most fifth-century authors writing about battles and wars in this period, even among those who are considered to be more authoritative (e.g., Olympiodorus). This deserves further inquiry.

[64] Oost 1966: 240.

[65] Drinkwater (1998: 289) comments, "we must remember that in 411 Constantius' great days were still to come."

[66] McEvoy 2013: 199, no. 67.

[67] Halsall 2007: 216.

[68] McEvoy 2013: 317–318.

during the critical juncture of Constantine III's power grab in Gaul and plans to pay Alaric in Noricum. When Honorius had to choose between the interests of the empire and his own personal safety, he chose the latter. Therefore, should Heraclianus have succeeded in securing Ravenna, he might well have persuaded Honorius to agree to the removal of Constantius. In such a scenario, he would probably have enjoyed the same position in regard to Honorius in Ravenna as the *generalissimo* Arbogastes had enjoyed in regard to Valentinian II in Vienne (ca 390–392), where the latter was held as a virtual prisoner in the palace.[69]

So what did Heraclianus' troops think that they were doing? Why did they follow him as far as they did? Liebeschuetz (1993: 269) remarks that when Heraclianus crossed over to Italy, the African army had become "his personal army," and this assessment is probably at least partially correct, since the legislation issued against his *sattellites* after the defeat of his revolt was not intended against regular soldiers who had been caught up in his revolt, but fighters dependent on his personal patronage (*CTh.* 9.40.21). However, the fact remains that the bulk of Heraclianus' forces must have been regular soldiers of the African field army. These surely realized that neither he nor they were properly authorized to sail to Italy in the way that they did. However, they may have attempted to justify their actions to themselves on the basis that they were not trying to remove a legitimately appointed Augustus, but only to protect him. This was a very risky strategy. The African field army had never been used against Italy in this way before, and for good reason.[70] There was also the danger that an apparent attack on the emperor might provoke Theodosius II, who had previously sent 4,000 soldiers to protect his uncle during Attalus' usurpation (Soz. 9.8.30–36).

Unfortunately for Heraclianus, his gamble failed when he was intercepted and defeated by the *comes* Marinus, about whom we know very little.[71] It has been plausibly suggested that he was probably a *comes domesticorum*.[72] Constantius was absent in Gaul with what was left of the field army. As commander of the imperial household troops, the *comes domesticorum* was the most important general in the western Roman army after the *magistri militum*,[73] and his were probably the only troops left at the disposal of Honorius in Italy. Heraclianus had to cross the Apennines to reach Ravenna and it is not inconceivable that Marinus lured him into an ambush. The soldiers at his disposal were elite troops and could have easily beaten the numerically stronger African field army if they were tactically positioned on superior ground and held the initiative. Heraclianus fled after his defeat, but soon paid with his life for this military adventure when

[69] See Croke 1976; McLynn 1994: 335–337; McEvoy 2013: 92–97.

[70] Burns (1994: 257) observes that "the fact that Heraclianus thought that he had a chance of success in invading Italy is proof of the pitiful state of Roman defenses there."

[71] *PLRE* 2: "Marinus 1," 724.

[72] Frend 1952: 293; Stein 1959: 265.

[73] Jones 1964: 143; Frank 1969: 83–90; Elton 1996: 101, 240.

killed in the *aedes Memoriae* at Carthage, an ironic end considering his *damnatio memoriae* (Hyd. 48 [56]).[74]

IV. CONCLUSION

Heraclianus' revolt is a significant illustration of the change of strategy in the early fifth century adopted by senior military commanders when they felt that their position, or life, was in imminent danger. He did not try to become emperor himself, but simply sought to gain control of the existing emperor. After the event, this distinction may have been lost on some, and others considered it advantageous to pretend that he had aimed at the throne. However, the fact remains that there is no real evidence that he did so. In this regard, there is a remarkable comparison with the revolt of Gildo. Courtois (1955: 131), who regarded Heraclianus as a usurper, remarked that there was nothing "African" about his rebellion except that it originated there—a stark contrast with Gildo whom he styled "grand caïd kabyle." In fact, Gildo's and Heraclianus' revolts have more in common than is often assumed. Stripped of allegations of tribal uprising or usurpation, both *comites Africae* aimed primarily at preserving their own position and bringing down the incumbent *magister utriusque militia*.[75] Both were declared *hostis publicus* as a result and later branded as "tyrants." However, Heraclianus' revolt was a result of structural change within the military hierarchy, a consequence of the emergence of the *generalissimo*, i.e., a *magister militum* dominating the western imperial court in the manner of Stilicho, and not some peculiar African phenomenon.

The violent downfall of Stilicho in 408 meant that for the first time since the genesis of the *generalissimo* a generation earlier, there was an opportunity for new men such as Constantius and Heraclianus to force their way into the highest echelons of military authority. Merobaudes (375–383), Bauto (ca 383–385/386), Arbogastes (ca 389–394), and Stilicho (394–408), the first four commanders who have traditionally been studied in this guise, owed their position and succession to one another above all to two factors: a position as palatine *magister militum* and a senior emperor's patronage. In contrast, neither Constantius' nor Heraclianus' ascendancy was as clear-cut.[76]

[74] The capricious nature of the surviving source tradition for the fifth-century imperial west is similarly illustrated by the western consulship of 447. In late antiquity, to be rewarded the consulship meant a chance of achieving a kind of immortality by being memorialized. Yet Calepius, western consul of 447, "is no more than a name on (mainly western) consular documents" (*CLRE* 429). We know virtually nothing of this individual in stark contrast with the disgraced Heraclianus, whose consulship was obliterated while his memory survived.

[75] See Wijnendaele 2017a.

[76] The very fact that Constantius does not feature once in Zosimus' extensive treament of the period ca 395–410, based on contemporary authors such as Eunapius and Olympiodorus, is a telling indication of his obscure background before his rise to power. Similarly, if Heraclianus had

Stilicho's death also gave Honorius for the first time an opportunity to seek a modicum of autonomy and a new balance of power among his generals. The emperor had previously found himself in a disadvantaged situation from the start of his reign. Merobaudes, Bauto, Arbogastes, and Stilicho had all risen to prominence during the reigns of military active emperors, such as Gratian and Theodosius I. The presence of a senior soldier-emperor, even a distant one such as Theodosius, could temper any overambitious acts of aspiring field commanders.[77] In contrast, Honorius had come to the western throne at the tender age of ten, with Stilicho already present as his father-in-law and supreme commander of western forces, and his adolescent brother and eastern emperor Arcadius equally ensnared in a ceremonial palace role. Honorius' distribution of different commands and honours to Constantius and Heraclianus could be seen as attempting to avoid a situation in which one of these men simply stepped into Stilicho's role.[78] How precarious this balancing act was becomes clear when we realize that in 412 the Palatine administration granted Constantius authority in some African affairs, while at the same time allocating the western consulship for the following year to Heraclianus.

However, being a loyal servant to the emperor, as Heraclianus had hitherto been, was no longer sufficient to protect oneself under this new system. Anyone aiming to become a *generalissimo* acted accordingly against all other senior officers whom he perceived as a threat to his ambitions. This usually meant trying to replace them with his own supporters, even if this sometimes meant arranging their assassination, or their execution on some trumped-up charge. In this particular case, Heraclianus seems to have thought that Constantius was about to act against him, and so tried to pre-empt this, but instead played straight into his hands. Finally, Constantius' apparent reaction to Heraclianus' revolt had an important side-effect. If, as the testimony of some sources seems to suggest, he tried to portray Heraclianus as a usurper subsequently, then he devalued this charge also. We find ourselves confronting an irony, that at a time when fewer

succeeded in his Italian venture he would have been the first man to become a *generalissimo* while operating outside the court. This would only become possible in the next decade, as exemplified in the early careers of the warlord-commanders Aëtius and Bonifatius; see Wijnendaele 2015; 2017b.

[77] This even holds true for Arbogastes, who has often been suspected of having murdered Valentinian II (*PLRE* 1 "Arbogastes," 95–97). Croke (1976) decisively demonstrated the long three-month gap between the latter's death and Arbogates' proclamation of Eugenius as western emperor in 392. The circulation of western coins in the name of Arcadius at this time is a further indication that Arbogastes was frantically seeking a rapprochement with Theodosius over what had probably been Valentinian's suicide.

[78] A similar tactic can be seen in Honorius' treatment of the *magister militum* Castinus and the *comes Africae* Bonifatius after Constantius' death. His half-sister Galla Placidia also tried to seek a *modus vivendi* between her commanders Aetius, Bonifatius, and Felix during the first five years of her regency over her son Valentinian III; see Wijnendaele 2015: 54–55, 66–68, 96–97.

generals were seeking the title of emperor, more were achieving it, albeit as usurpers or false emperors.

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